

# DEPARTMENT of the INTERIOR

news release

FISH AND WILDLIFE SERVICE

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## CANADA GOOSE HUNTING RESTRICTIONS IN CALIFORNIA

Hunting of Canada geese in three coastal counties of northern California and in the Sacramento and San Joaquin Valleys will be partially restricted this autumn as part of a three-stage Federal program to protect the endangered Aleutian Canada goose, Interior's U.S. Fish and Wildlife Service announced today.

The restrictions, published in the Federal Register on September 5 as part of the migratory waterfowl regulations for the upcoming hunting season are designed to give special attention to the endangered goose. From a distance the several subspecies of Canada geese are similar, so Federal and State officials agreed to ban all Canada goose hunting in the areas where the endangered goose is known to visit. Last year, recoveries from banded geese showed the birds definitely frequented areas where the restrictions are proposed for the coming fall hunting season.

Aleutian Canada geese are among the world's rarest waterfowl. Today they number about 1,000 in the wild--up from a low of under 300 a few years ago. At one time Aleutian Canada geese were abundant along all the rocky islands of the Aleutian chain from where scientists hypothesized that they migrated south along the North American Pacific Coast. The arctic fox was introduced onto most of the islands many years ago for fur production. Foxes flourished because they had no natural enemies and an ample food supply, including, unfortunately, the Aleutian goose.

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The Federal recovery program for this goose involves three steps: (1) captive breeding and restocking, (2) protection of migrating and wintering birds in Alaska and the lower 48 States, and (3) elimination of foxes on the Aleutian Islands.

Scientists speculate that restocking programs will take about 10 years to succeed. They hope to reestablish 100 nesting pairs of geese on each of three islands in the Aleutian chain--Buldir, Agattu, and Amchitka. If these efforts are successful the Aleutian Canada goose will have a reasonably secure population and it would be a candidate for removal from the endangered or threatened lists.

This recovery program calls for stepped up efforts to breed the goose in captivity. To date 200 have been hatched and raised at the Patuxent Wildlife Research Center in Laurel, Maryland, and 116 of these have been released back into the wild. A second captive breeding site is being planned and birds raised at both locations will be transferred to a holding site in the Aleutian Islands at the age of six months. There they will be held until they get accustomed to the climate and reach the breeding age of two to three years. They will then be released on the islands to breed. Wild birds will be placed with these geese to guide them south to traditional wintering grounds along the west coast of North America and Japan. The next transplant to the Aleutian Islands from Patuxent is planned for the summer of 1976.

The third part of the proposed recovery plan is the removal of arctic foxes from the nesting islands. Fox removal is necessary if the reintroduction of geese is to succeed. Since the foxes are an introduced species on most of the Aleutians and their introduction caused the decline of the geese, their elimination presents no ecological conflict. Of the three islands, only Amchitka is presently fox-free. Research on how best to deal with the foxes is presently underway. Control work on Agattu has reduced the fox population, and they should be totally eliminated by the spring of 1976.

The hunting restrictions in California this autumn will be phased to coincide with the expected southern flight of the geese. In Del Norte, Humboldt, and Mendocino Counties the closure will be complete for the entire hunting season from October through January. In the Sacramento Valley the closure will be in effect from October 1 until December 15, by which time the geese are expected to have left the area. In the San Joaquin Valley the closure will not begin until December 15 when the birds normally arrive in the valley. It will remain in effect through the end of the hunting season. As further information is gained on the wintering ground and distribution of these geese, necessary adjustments will be made in hunting regulations.

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